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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 10, 2018

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NAEP Report Confirms Achievement Gaps Not Closing Quickly Enough For All Students to Succeed in Alabama

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Report released today shows minor changes for Alabama – revealing some improvements compared to the nation, but also concerning trends. Nationwide, the results show little change in student performance since 2015.

Long-term trends for Alabama and the nation show that achievement gaps among students from low-income and minority families, compared with their more affluent and white peers, are not closing quickly enough--and in some cases, not at all.

“The 2017 NAEP results are an indication we must continue working toward the goal of creating an education system in Alabama that prepares all students for college and career,” said Caroline Novak, President of A+ Education Partnership. “These results show small steps in the right direction, but we must redouble our efforts.”

Alabama’s 4th grade math ranking rose to 47th in the nation in 2017, up from 52nd in 2015. The state also rose to 47th in 8th Grade math in 2017, up from 51st. Alabama’s 4th Grade reading moved up one spot in 2017 to 40th from 41st. In 8th Grade reading, Alabama maintained its position at 47th in 2017.

Recently, A+ joined six other education groups across the South to release a major report that calls for states to make greater progress in addressing gaps in achievement and opportunity.

[*Accelerating the Pace: The Future of Education in the American South*](#) makes the case for stronger academic and nonacademic support for students, greater investment in preparing and supporting educators, and more. The accompanying *Education Poll of the South* shows strong support among registered voters of all backgrounds and viewpoints for smart investments in education: 85 percent of Southerners polled want their state to address differences in the quality of education children receive across their state.

Accelerating the Pace outlines four ways Alabama can improve its educational system:

1. **Prepare Alabama’s finest to work in classrooms and schools.** Research shows that effective teachers are the most important factor in a child’s education. Alabama needs to recruit more talented young people into teaching and prepare them better to teach children and lead schools.

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2. **Give today's students the support they need.** A rising number of students are from poor families and communities, and they need different types of support than earlier generations.
3. **Strengthen the bridge from high school into college or work.** Students should be able to finish high school truly ready for what is next. And those options should be much more accessible and seamless.
4. **Match resources with students' specific needs.** The school finance system in Alabama has not changed much since the 1990s. Alabama should examine the resources required for schools to meet higher goals and do everything possible to provide them, while requiring strong results.

[Click here to read *Accelerating the Pace*.](#)

As the NAEP data show, Alabama as a whole has made progress over the long term. Trend data highlight the impact of the fully funded Alabama Reading Initiative from 2003 to 2011. Funding was cut in 2008 and subsequent years.

In recent years, Alabama has taken steps toward closing the achievement gap by raising expectations for all students statewide. Beginning in 2012-13, Alabama began implementing the Alabama College & Career Ready Standards (CCRS), which raise the bar of expectations for all Alabama students, and are more closely aligned with higher standards adopted in other states and the expectations of NAEP.

Further, beginning in 2013-14, Alabama made dramatic gains toward closing its "[honesty gap](#)," or the gap between what is expected of students on state standardized tests and the NAEP by administering the ACT Aspire. That test was given to third through eighth graders in reading and math and was more closely aligned to the CCRS. Results showed scores for Alabama students roughly in line with the NAEP, whereas older state assessments showed roughly twice as many students proficient as NAEP. The State Board of Education voted to end its contract for the ACT Aspire in the summer of 2018 and a state task force is now working toward choosing a new state assessment.

"As Alabama looks to improving in the future, it must maintain high expectations for all students and adopt a growth mindset for the state and its education system. Our students are as capable of excellence as any in the world, and our education system must reflect that," said Thomas Rains, Vice President of Operations and Policy at A+.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the largest nationally representative, continuing evaluation of the condition of education in the United States. Also called the "Nation's Report Card," it has served as a national yardstick of student achievement since 1969. NAEP informs the public about what American students know and can do in various subject areas and compares achievement among states, large urban districts, and various student groups.

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